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### The rise of verb-second

**Citation for published version:**

Los, B 2016, 'The rise of verb-second', *Nederlandse Taalkunde*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 265-273.  
<https://doi.org/10.5117/NEDTAA2016.2.BLOS>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.5117/NEDTAA2016.2.BLOS](https://doi.org/10.5117/NEDTAA2016.2.BLOS)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Nederlandse Taalkunde

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Hans Broekhuis and Norbert Corver: Syntax of Dutch: Verbs and Verb Phrases Vol. III, Chapter 10: Word order in the clause II: Position of the finite verb (verb-first/second). Amsterdam University Press.

The appearance of the seventh and final volume of the Syntax of Dutch is a cause for celebration – the completion of an in-depth analysis of the facts and the issues of Dutch syntax, a proper “linguists’ grammar” which makes good on its promise to make available ‘[t]he new factual and analytical body of knowledge [...] often buried in articles and books that concentrate on theoretical issues and are, therefore, not available in a systematized way’ and to ‘present the facts as completely as possible and in a way that will “speak” to modern linguists but will also and increasingly become a new type of grammatical resource for the semi- and nonspecialist’ (back of the Open Access version of the 6th volume).

Although it is not the business of a synchronic grammar to appeal to diachronic data, there are a number of topics in this chapter which call out for a historical footnote. This is why my paper will say something about the rise of verb-second and the rise of hypotaxis. I will conclude with a take on the “immobile” verbs discussed in section 10.2 that tries to take issue with assuming too rigid a dichotomy between “core” and “peripheral” grammar.

The motivation behind verb-second may have been at first stylistic, an optional rule to draw attention to the special information-structural status of the first constituent (see Los 2012). It is a common finding that subclauses tend to preserve older orders, whereas main clauses tend to innovate: main clauses have to satisfy various communicative requirements, the positioning of focus and discourse-old or discourse-new material, and they therefore tend to develop special constructions not found in the subclause (Bybee 2001).

The verb-second rule operates slightly differently in Old English than in Modern Dutch or Modern German, as was demonstrated by van Kemenade (1987). The original motivation for movement to C is focus; when the first constituent is a *wh*-word or the negator *ne*, the finite verb will immediately follow in C in Old English, with the subject, whether nominal or pronominal, in the third position; but if the first constituent is a topicalized nominal or prepositional object, or adjunct, the verb will be in a lower head (though higher than T – it is neutrally labelled “F” in the table below); it will still be followed by nominal subjects, but pronominal subjects will precede such a verb, resulting in a verb-third surface order. The fact that the material in Spec,CP in such cases tends to link to the immediately preceding discourse, the asymmetrical positions of nominal and pronominal positions points to an original motivation for this movement as demarcating a domain for given information.

SpecCP	C	SpecFP	F	TP – VP - ...
<i>hwæt</i> what	<i>selþ</i> sells	<i>he</i> he		...
<i>ðuruh þæt gescead ana</i> through that understanding alone		<i>we</i> we	<i>synd</i> are	<i>sælran þonne þa ungesceadwysan nytenu</i> better than the unreasoning animals
<i>Mid þam</i> with those (people)			<i>wunode</i> lived	<i>an mæden</i> a maiden

Table 1: Focus demarcation by V-to-C, given/new demarcation by V-to-F

Even in Old English, these motivations are already becoming obscured; note that discourse links can be “given” as well as focused (cf. the focusing effect of *ana* ‘only, alone’ in the second example in the table), and V-to-C is increasingly used to demarcate the foregrounded event in a correlatively-

linked pair of *then*-clauses (on a par with Dutch *Toen hij mij zag, toen kwam hij onmiddellijk op me af*) which would otherwise have gone unmarked at all, as both clauses have pronominal subjects. This reflects the competing motivations of assertion versus foregrounding as the demarcating line between main and subclauses (see Cristofaro 2003: 35), and hence, as motivations for verb movement; indeed, verb-movement may fail in Old English main clauses, particularly if they are the second or following member of a string of coordinated conjuncts, which offers a range of choices in Old English narratives to mark major episodes from sub-episodes (see Los 2015 for a detailed analysis). These historical data show the forcefield in which verb-second in Dutch ultimately emerged as a purely syntactic phenomenon (cf. Broekhuis & Corver's observation on p. 1229 that the Dutch rules represent a 'more or less random' selection from a wider range of movement possibilities). The fact that it is only the second movement (to F) that was lost in English lends further support to the scenario of two landing sites and (at least) two functional motivations, as T-to-C robustly survives in Present-Day English for focus (questions, negation, *only*-clauses), even though V-to-T is lost, and T-to-C is hence restricted to auxiliaries. The idea of expressing a head either by moving another head into it (V-to-C) or by having that head filled by what I would call a "bespoke" lexical item like a complementizer can be made part of a larger scenario for modelling morphosyntactic change, including the genesis of verb-second. Following Roberts & Roussou (1999, 2003), we have the following three options: a functional head can be expressed (i) by a bound morpheme located in that head, necessitating movement as bound morphemes need a host (merge-and-move); (ii) by movement of another head into the functional head (move); or (iii) by a "bespoke" free morpheme (merge). This offers a diachronic scenario of the various stages of moving from a synthetic language like Old English to a more analytic language like Present-Day English, with the loss of inflections partly compensated by the rise of new functional items recruited from the lexicon in a process of grammaticalization. But it also provides a scenario for verb-second, as originally triggered by a bound morpheme (merge-and-move), with the movement persisting even when the morpheme was lost (move); and the recognition by speakers that certain "bespoke" free morphemes – complementizers – express that same function of clause-typing, and hence can be found in the same head (merge).

Gothic, that early East Germanic cousin of Old English, shows the remains of an earlier system that indicated clause-type by means of special second-position clitics, a smoking gun for the merge-and-move beginnings of verb-second: *-u*, for interrogatives (yes/no questions) and *-uh* 'and' (a cognate of Latin *-que*), as an element introducing foregrounded narrative progression. Both had developed a discourse function by the time of Gothic, and had become optional: *-u*, which is an optional element, adds an emotional colouring to the question, of surprise or disappointment; *-uh*, which co-exists alongside a more neutral conjunction *jah*, introduces a new element in the discourse (Ferraresi 2005). Significantly, *-u*, *-uh*, as well as *þan* ('then', foregrounded narrative progression) are often sandwiched between a preverb (like *ga-*, ancestor of Dutch *ge-*) and the verb, which leads to morphologically complex verbs; in (1), a single verb, with its full complement of clitics, expresses an embedded question:

- (1)     ga-**u**-hva-sehvi (Mark 8:23)  
           ga-WH-anything-saw.3sg  
           'whether he saw anything'

The realization that verb-second represents an innovation allows us to interpret a number of special constructions that are the topic of section 10.3 as pre-verb-second relics of earlier paratactic devices that were used to establish interclausal coherence. In Present-Day grammars, the label *correlative* is restricted to clauses that have identical linking elements: *wat niet weet, wat niet deert; hoe langer ik*

*ernaar kijk hoe meer ik erin ontdek* (p. 1269). These relics compete with verb-second alternatives, and there are grounds, in a synchronic grammar, to relegate them to the part of the grammar that is consciously learned (the periphery, p. 1270), as is the common lot of relics. Another historical type, also much in evidence in early Germanic, is adverbial (including concessive and conditional) clauses of the type *Als ... V, dan V ...* (section 10.3.2), which, in a grammar of Old English, would have been ranged under the same paratactic correlatives as the *wat niet weet, wat niet deert* type; what connects them is the device of linking a pair of clauses by means of deictic elements from the s/p-system of specific pronominal reference (demonstratives, *such*, and adverbs like *thus, then, so*), a paratactic discourse linking system which was intimately connected with the Spec,CP position, and was obscured, in both English and Dutch, by *wh*-elements encroaching on the s/p-system. Earlier paratactic *þa þa ... V, þa V ...* or *þær ... V, þær ... V* clauses were transformed into hypotactic *when..., (then)* and *where..., (there)* clauses in English, with clear demarcations of complementizer versus adverb, and non-main versus main clause, where there had not been any such formal distinction before, only a semantic one (foregrounding/backgrounding, assertion/non-assertion). For Dutch, where such left dislocation patterns survive much more robustly, and more clearly marked as paratactic (clause-external), the question posed on p. 1279, ‘How is it that left-dislocated clauses can sometimes take the form of either a main or a non-main clause?’ can only be answered against this historical background, where verb positions in any individual type may have become as the result of this forcefield may have become entrenched. A more innovative type is contrastive pairs like *Gaat Peter graag uit, JAN zit liever thuis* (see p. 1280-3, including an insightful semantic analysis).

One of the side-effects of a grammar of this kind is to flag up mysteries that are potential avenues for future research. In Chapter 5, for instance, section 5.1.3 III. *The anticipatory pronoun het and expletive er* (723-725) tries to find a generalization underlying the choice between the two in constructions like *Het is duidelijk geworden dat...* versus *Er is duidelijk geworden dat*, suggesting a preliminary answer outside the syntax component of the grammar in terms of information structure. For Chapter 10, an obvious example of a mystery is the question why some complex verbs resist verb-second, not in the sense that they resist being split up (like verbs such as *liefkozen* ‘caress’ (*Jan liefkoosde Marie*) or *omsingelen* ‘surround’ (*Het leger omsingelde de stad*) but in terms of not allowing movement to C in main clauses at all. This is a pretty startling finding for such a “core” phenomenon as verb-second in Dutch, and the problem is complicated further by the fact that the evidence from usage data is conflicting. After a lengthy discussion (1231-1268), Broekhuis & Corver throw the towel in the ring and relegate the problem to the lexicon. There are a number of further points that can be made about these items, however, although it means we have to leave “core” grammar behind and try to seek finer-grained regularities within the “periphery”; we may also have to accept that the distinction “automatically acquired” versus “consciously learned” cannot be drawn as rigidly as all that. Speakers make deductions on the basis of their lexicon, frequency and usage that sets up niches of order in an otherwise unpredictable and arbitrary chaos.

The items discussed in section 10.2 are verbal X+V collocations that fall into three distinct groups: (i) separable items like *autorijden* en *pianospelen*, which separate in verb-second, and in *ge-* and *te* forms, and, Broekhuis & Corver claim, in the *aan het* construction, but not in verb raising constructions. They are negated by *geen* rather than *niet*. (ii) inseparable X+V collocations like *bekvechten* and *liefkozen*, which do not separate at all – neither in verb-second, in *ge-* and *te* forms, in the *aan het* construction, or in verb raising constructions. They are negated by *geen* rather than *niet*, and their past tense forms do not show any irregular forms that might have been expected on the basis of the simple verb (so *gebekvecht* rather than *gebekvochten* or *bekgevochten*). The second group shows these behaviours consistently, but the first group does not. Some of this may be due to

dual membership (*stofzuigen*), but the variation between (expected) *geen auto kunnen rijden* versus (unexpected) *niet auto kunnen rijden* found in corpus data is too robust for the latter to be dismissed as writing errors, and the conclusion must be drawn that noun-incorporation is an optional phenomenon (p. 1248). Before we continue with the third, and most interesting group, we can pause here to note that N+V compounds are rare in Dutch, and mostly due to backformation (*autorijder*, *stofzuiger*); and that there are, on the other hand, two other groups in the language that are extremely productive, and that it is extremely likely that they provide the models for (i) and (ii): (A) particle verbs, which separate in verb-second, in *ge-* and *te* forms; this they share with the syntactic construction they derive from. Unlike the syntactic construction, however, they MAY but NEED NOT separate in the *aan het* construction, and in verb raising constructions, and it is this that sets them apart as having undergone grammaticalization; if Germanic had not developed verb-second, they would have gone the way of the prefixed verbs (group (B) below), but separation in verb-second is a robust clue in acquisition that prevents further grammaticalization, and leads to this ambiguous behaviour which requires some optionality to be built into the system; in Los et al. (2012), this is done by adding a morphological category of “optionally-projecting word”. Speakers’ comparison of the formal and semantic properties of existing combinations with a specific particle (a paradigmatic analysis) leads to the derivation of a template with a fixed particle slot that is used to form new combinations with this particular particle (a syntagmatic analysis). Some adjectival grammaticalized secondary predicates like *fijn*, *schoon* and *open* show similar behaviour and syntagmatic productivity (*fijnmalen*, *fijnwrijven*, *fijnhakken*, *fijnstampen*; *schoonmaken*, *schoonboenen*, *schoonwrijven*; *openmaken*, *openhalen*, *openleggen*. (B) prefixed verbs like *be-*, *ont-*, *ver-* and *er-* formations, whose templates predate the rise of verb-second, and provide the model for the *bekvechten* and *liefkozen* group.

The interesting group is a third type, (iii) the “immobile” verbs like *stijldansen* and *mastklimmen* which do not allow movement to T or C at all (\**zij stijldansden*/\**mastklommen*). If we leave aside the complex cases of *vooraanmelden* and *herinvoeren*, where a contributing factor to the immobility of these verbs is, undoubtedly, the stacking of prefixes and particles, the class of immobile verbs is mainly represented by the semantic class of what could be called *leisure activities, games, and sports*: *Zaklopen*, *koekhappen*, *vuurspuwen*, *hoefijzerwerpen*, *steltlopen*, *mastklimmen*, *blikgooien*, *parachutespringen*, *spoorzoeken*, *paardrijden*, *zweefvliegen*, *wadlopen*, *handlezen/auralezen/kaartlezen*, *kogelstoten*, *koordansen*, *steengrillen*, *mondschilderen*, *vingerverven*, *ballonvaren*, *zeezeilen*, *windsurfen*, *watertrappelen*, *touwtjespringen*, *stijldansen* and *hardlopen*, and, possibly, *handlezen*. Many of these arise from conversion (like *voetballen*, p. 1235, which is also the odd one out of the activities by following the (B) group). Other examples are *hoelahoepen*, *hoepelen*, *eenwieleren*, *schaatsen* and *kegelen*. The noun *voetbal* for the game is a loan from English; the word was already around much earlier to denote the ball. Some other items, like *windsurfen*, also appear to be loans from English, as well as activities of a different sort, like *gedachtelezen* ‘mindreading’ and *hersenspoelen* ‘brainwashing’.

These formations are said on p 1244ff to have a mixed bag of characteristics: separable by *ge-* and *te* but not by *aan het* or verb raising, and this is rationalized by relegating *ge-* and *te* to the morphology, so that these combinations can be argued to be separable in morphological contexts only, not in syntactic contexts. There are a number of clear problems with this analysis: relegating *aan het* to the syntax and *te* to the morphology seems arbitrary, and the subsequent corpus searches (p 1251-52) throw up many cases of separation by *ge-* and *te* as well as by *aan het*. The most useful approach, as with the particle verbs, is to assume a natural tendency to grammaticalize the combination into a single head, to match the semantics (cf. the maxim in van Gelderen 2004: *be a head, not a phrase*). This means that non-separation by *ge-* is the ideal. Verbs with irregular

participles like *ballonvaren*, *parachutespringen*, *steltlopen* en *wadlopen* experience brakes on grammaticalization, as non-separation means they have to violate the normal irregular form; the numbers of ge-X-V- are therefore very low (p. 1252); but for *te*, the ratios are far more balanced (Ibid.), which makes sense as there are no brakes: the infinitive form after *te* does not necessitate making a choice between regular or irregular inflection, speakers are free to go for the more grammaticalized formation, and a similar motivation accounts for the preponderance of *aan het* X V data instead of expected X *aan het* V. The verb-raising facts, too, show a balance (at least for *ballonvaren*); Broekhuis & Corver's decision to look for forms with *singular* simple present form of the modals (p. 1252) may have influenced the results, as these generic activities are much more likely to occur with plural verbs (in information brochures, etc.) than as people reporting them as activities associated with any specific individual:

(2) Bent u zo iemand die zegt dat u altijd al eens heeft willen **parachutespringen**?  
<http://www.paraclubhoevenen.net/>

(3) Altijd al eens een keer **parachute** willen **springen**? <http://www.heliair.nl/helikoptervluchten/>

(4) Toch zijn de bamboestoelen niet zo heel erg comfortabel en de rust wordt soms wreed verstoord door vrouwen die wel héél erg graag je **hand** willen **lezen**. <http://nl.gbetimes.com/reizen/renmin-park-chengdu-van-hiphop-omas-tot-ijzeren-wattenstaafjes>

How to account for the non-occurrence of these verbs in T or C, whether as separable or inseparable forms? Membership to group (i) is arguably restricted to combinations the left-hand member of which must be a complement of the verbal part (Ackema's 1999 hypothesis, slightly amended (p. 1234)), but *paard* in *paardrijden* and *piano* in *pianospielen* are not the type of objects that *rijden* and *spelen* would occur with in the syntax (p. 1240); and *paard* and *piano* are discourse-inert in the combination, unable to refer to specific horses and pianos, which points to incorporation (p. 1241). There is no good reason, then, why the "activities" cannot follow model (A), or, like *voetballen*, follow model (B). An option also explored by Broekhuis & Corver is that the "activities"-verbs have defective paradigms (no finite forms), but they reject this as finite forms are robustly attested, just not in C or T (p. 1232). The phenomenon of defective paradigms is possibly weirder than they give it credit for; in standard Russian the word *mečta* 'dream' is defective, lacking a genitive plural; Baerman & Corbett (2010: 1) note that the genitive is required in plenty of contexts; but Instead of creating a form along the usual lines, speakers go for laborious alternative strategies, such as using a different lexeme or a syntactic construction that does not require a genitive. This is reminiscent of Broekhuis & Corver's suggestion that the *aan het*-construction appears to function as an escape-hatch alternative to movement to T or C (p. 1233). So finiteness might not be the operative concept here, but some other constraint. 'Morphology ought simply be the handmaid of grammatical meaning, producing forms where other components require them', but apparently, this is not the case (Baerman & Corbett 2010:1). Typical diachronic reasons for such gaps include borrowing from some other language 'into a paradigm that requires a morphological alternation not found in the source' (Baerman & Corbett 2010: 10). A related process is derivation, and the Russian word for 'to vacuum', a conversion from a noun meaning 'vacuum cleaner', resists taking part in the stem-final consonant alternation in the 1sg that is required for that inflectional class. The paradigm for this verb as well as for some other novel ones ends up as defective: 'there may be some reluctance to apply the alternation, balanced by an equal reluctance not to violate the requirements of the inflectional class' (Baerman & Corbett 2010: 10). It could be that the names of our "activities" are conceptually too much like nouns to take part in the ultimate test of verbal status: V-to-C. Remember that the infinitival form in Dutch doubles as the functional equivalent of the nominal

gerund in English, where we see similar conversion problems in that the activity *ballroom dancing* has not been able to create a corresponding verb 'to ballroom dance'. Broekhuis & Corver are probably correct in nailing down the few instances in the data like *zij sprong touwtje* as being more acceptable among people who practise the activity on a regular basis, which might explain the higher frequency of such items in sporting discourse (p. 1233).

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